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Name: Driyü, Phüntso Dorje [Tib. 'bri yul, phun tshogs rdo rje]

Gender: Male

Age: 59

Date of Birth: 1941

Abstract

Phüntso Dorje [Tib. phun tshogs rdo rje] was an aristocrat from the Driyü [Tib. 'bri yul] family. In this interview, he talks about his education at the Nyarongsha school in Lhasa and in the Tsikhang, as well as about studying diu (the traditional Tibetan arithmetic system). He discusses his work as a gagpa, or bodyguard for the kalön, and his position as the Tsasho officer in charge of collecting salt and wool taxes in Tanag, as well as his work as the head of the Lungmar estate. He also talks about his work paying out salaries to the Tibetan road construction laborers and about becoming a member of the Political Consultative Conference after the revolt. Due to the Panchen Lama incident, Phüntso Dorje was sent to a reform through labor camp for three years and discusses how he again became a member of the Political Consultative Conference.

Tape 1

Q: Where is this place located?

A: If we go from Gyantse, we will reach a place called Ralung. In early times, it belonged to Reting, but then they confiscated Reting's property. In the beginning, they sent a tsidrun [to administrate it]. Nowadays, the place is called Tanag [Tib. rta nag]. To get there one has to go north from Shigatse.

Q: Which county does it belong to now?

A: Probably Tanag County.

Q: There is no Tanag County.

A: There were two places. One was called Shey [Tib. bzhad] and one was called Tanag. In the old society, a lot of travelers had to pass this crossroads. Because of this, the government set up an office to collect the salt tax from the traders who were selling salt and wool. The salt tax got more tax income than the wool, so this official was called "tsasho". I was appointed as the salt tax collector for a three year term, but I did not do the job. I leased it to another person and I collected three hundred dotse as the lease fee. The person who took this job could make a good income. After collecting the taxes from the salt and wool traders, he had to hand in his collection quota/obligation (to the government), but he still would have a lot of money left over [that he kept].

Q: The tax on salt was the main income, right?

A: Yes, it was. There was some tax from the wool trade, but the income from that was not much. I was appointed as an official to be the salt tax collector.

Q: Where did you have to hand in the salt taxes?

A: We had to hand it to the Tsikhang. [very bad recording] The Kashag's gagpa and the tsidrun were not same. The Kashag's gagpa were the official bodyguards for the kalön such as Ngabö and so on. Those gagpa had to pay some taxes [had obligations]. For example, they had to send horsemen to the annual Mönlam Prayer Festival. However, the gagpa of the silön did not have to attend such activities. Moreover, they did not have to go to work everyday. You know, the gagpa of the Kashag had to work every day. The silön did not have many things to do except attend ceremonies, so their gagpa also did not have to do a lot. After I served for three years as gagpa, I was appointed as the Tanag Tsasho.

Q:

A: My hometown was Namling [Tib. nam gling] county. I had entered the Tsikhang and then became a lay official as we were hereditarily gerpa.

Q: Please give me the specific name of this area.

A: If you ride a horse to go to my place from the county seat of Namling, it takes one day. But today it only takes about two hours by car. My homeland was called Gyatso.

Q: Oh, I am going to Namling County Emagang [Tib. e ma sgang] about two weeks from now.

A: If you go to Emagang, you will not reach Namling

A: My household was called Driyü [Tib. 'bri yul]. In the early times, the minister Seru Gungtön [Tib. se ru gung ston] (of the King Songtsen Gambo [Tib. strong btsan sgam po]) fled (from China) while he and the minister Gar Tongtsen [Tib. mgar stong btsan] were in China. Seru was jealous of Gar Tongtsen and told the Chinese Emperor to keep Gar Tongtsen when the Emperor told them that one minister should remain in China.

Later, Gar Tongtsen caught up with him at a place in the Kham area. After they arrived at the palace of the king in Tibet, the king knew that minister Seru was jealous of Gar and that he probably would get punished for it. So Seru fled from the king's palace and resided in the Gyatsohang [Tib. rgya mtsho thang] area permanently. At that time, there was no one who knew reading and writing in this area and the members of this household were the only ones who were literate. Every generation of Seru became literate and they came to the Namling area to read Buddhist scriptures. Many people liked to hire them to do ritual activities and they earned good livelihoods from it. Then they slowly became sort of a lord [Tib. dpon po] in that area. Later the local people used to say that the wanderers from Drigung were smart to earn livelihoods, and since then people called this household "Driyü" [Tib. bri yul].

Q: Did you have any schooling?

A: Yes. When I was 8 years old I went to the Nyarongsha School that was located at the corner of the big prayer pole, Dongchensur [Tib. gdong rtse zur], in Lhasa. All of the students were very young. At that time, there were only about five or six private schools in Lhasa and the Nyarongsha School was the biggest school. It had more students and those students were younger than those in the other schools. Sometimes its students would number over 120. I went to this school from eight years of age and I studied there until I was fifteen years old. Then I became a tsidrugpa, a member of Tsikhang of the government. In the Iron-Tiger Year [Tib. lcags stags], the Dalai Lama took over the authority of the Tibetan government in both religion and politics and I became an lay official.

Q: What was your job when you were in the Tsikhang?

A: We were pretty much like students. We were studying hand writing. Before the tsipön came, we had to study mathematics. We learned how to do accounting by diu and there were things like the nine times tables and fractions [Tib. dgu mtha' cha phran] etcetera.

Q: What do you remember about it?

A: I remember saying the nine times tables.

Q: What is it?

A: It is the formula of the first level table and we had to memorize things such as "nine multiplied by one gets nine" [Tib. dgu gcig gcig la dgu rang yin] and the eight times and so on.

Q: If you learned this formula, where could you use it?

A: It is mathematics and they taught us. After we learned all levels of the formula, the Tsikhang received the taxes that the dzong and the estates collected from the local households. We calculated them when they were handed in to our office. This was called "collected income" [Tib. yong sdud]. It was not useful for daily life, but we used to account for the income collected as taxes by diu.

Q: Did you see this?

A: No, I did not. I never saw that calculation.

Q: What did you do then?

A: Usually, after one graduated from the Tsikhang, one requested to enter government service [Tib. zhabs sdod]. Nowadays, students who studied in the Tsikhang are given the qualification of Secondary Specialized Training School [Ch. zhongzhuan].

Q: When was it?

A: It was given about three years ago. Or maybe it was four years ago.

Q: It is a special policy of the Political Consultative Conference, right?

A: I guess it is a policy of the government of the TAR. Those people who worked or studied in the Tsikhang were given the

qualification of Secondary Specialized Training School. However, there were many people who had entered government service before us without being students in the Tsikhang and the Tse labdra, and they did not give them such qualifications. Those people who had worked or studied in the Tsikhang and the Tse labdra were given this qualification. But I needed someone else from the old society to prove my background.

Q: How many of your co-students are living here now?

A: Only a few people who entered government service (then) are living here, but there are some people who have been in the Tsikhang.

Q: Do you know anyone who probably remembers more about the diu?

A: I think Shatra and Lhalu who are in the Political Consultative Conference know about it. Oh! You can ask about it to Kyibu Phüntso Tseden [Tib. skyid sbugs phun tshogs tshe brtan]. When he was in the Tsikhang, they were given many different levels of certification. It was different from us. We did not get such certifications. I heard Kyibu and a son of Lukhang [Tib. klu khang] got high certifications.

Q: What is the name of the son of Lukhang?

A: He used to be a gadrung. He was captured (in the revolt) and later was released and went to India because his father and other relatives were there. He died in India.

Q: What else did you do?

A: After I did three years as the Tsasho in Tanag, I was appointed to work on the project that was building a road from Kham to Lhasa. I did not have to stay with the workers because I was told to manage the salary for the workers. I got the salary from the [Chinese] Military Headquarters of Tibet [Ch. junqu] in Lhasa. They gave me the dayan and I changed them in the Trapchi Office. I had to change them because if I took the silver coins they would be too heavy to carry from here to the area where the workers were working. In order to decrease the burden of the local people, I changed it (to Tibetan paper money). Otherwise, I would have had to hire a lot of animals to move them. I took one-hundred note paper money. At that time, there were many road repairing projects in different places and I went to Kongpo and Dakpo. Some people were sent to Lhoka and some people were sent to Tsang. When the revolt occurred, I was a head of the Lungmar Estate [Tib. lung dmar gzhis sdod]. It was a small area.

Q: Who appointed you to this job?

A: The Dalai Lama appointed me after he took political power.

Q: Did you take this position?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: What did you do there?

A: There were not many things I needed to do. If there were some arguments between the local people, or if they sued each other in the county government, I judged the cases.

Q: What was the difference between the head of Gyantse County and your position?

A: There was a huge difference. Gyantse County was much bigger than us.

Q: Did the estate of Lungmar belong to the government?

A: Yes, it was a government estate. When I was the head of this estate, it was managed by the government and I had to do the accounting to the Shigatse Dzong [Tib. gzhis rtse spyi rdzong]. I handed in our income to it. As for the remainder, at that time, we got a salary and could not keep all the income that was generated in our area. It was different from the way they did it before [the Tibetan government's internal reforms].

Q: What was your rank (in the Tibetan government) [Tib. rim pa]?

A: The head of Lungmar was the seventh rank [Tib. rim pa bdun pa]. Basically, when we entered the government service, we were [of the] seventh rank.

Q: You were the only official there, right?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have any helpers?

A: No, I did not. It was a very small estate.

Q: How many people were there?

A: There were about seventy households under this estate.

Q: How much land did you have?

A: It had about 160 or 170 khe of land. Because it was a narrow valley, it did not produce much. I heard that it used to have a very good income and that Reting Labrang managed it for a long time. At that time there were no motorable roads so the traders moving wool from Tibet to India had to pass via the Ralung [Tib. ra lung] Village and this village was located very close to Lungmar Estate. So they used to sell grain, hay and fodder to the traders. However, when I was in this estate, there was no one moving things such as wool by animals, so we did not get any income from it.

Q: What did you do there? Could you please tell me what you did from the beginning of the year to the end of the year in your position?

A: We (I) did nothing. Mainly if there was some argument, we judged it. If the government sent an edict, we transmitted it to the local people. That's all. We did not have many things to do.

Q: Did you live on the estate?

A: I had lived on the estate [for] about three months. Almost one year after I took this position, the revolt occurred, so I did not get much time to stay there.

Q: If there were some arguments, how did you deal with them?

A: I interrogated both sides when they were suing. Then I wrote down a final verdict. In it, first the argument of the party requesting the case was written on the paper and then the statement of the other side was put down. Then I judged whose statements was correct and informed them of the final verdict.

Q: When the local people brought a case to you, how did you do it? I mean what kind of customs did you have to follow? For example, people might take a khata.

A: There was a customary way to do it. They gave many gifts such as khata, meat, butter, eggs, and some other local products. And some money called the "present for asking help" gyabden.

Q: Did you meet many times about this?

A: No, I did not, because our estate was very small. I probably stayed there about five months, and during this time there was only one argument brought before me.

Q: Were there some officials under you in this area? Such as gembo and tsodrag?

A: There was only one gembo in this area and no tsodrag.

Q: Who picked the gembo? Did the local people elect him?

A: Actually, I do not know who selected the gembo. He was the head of village before I came there. I guess it was a position that he inherited from his father.

Q: At that time, the taxes were collected according to the size of the lands. The Iron-Tiger Year's Land Enumeration [Tib. lcags stags zhib gzhung] was a list of fields, but this list had been previously made many years [ago] and the actual lands had changed some. Did you remeasure lands in your area?

A: No, I absolutely did not. The reason was that before that time Reting Labrang controlled this estate and after it was confiscated from him, it was managed by the government. A tsidrun was sent to manage it. The estate did not have any documents, including a copy of the Tiger Year's Land Enumeration. When I took the position, I only got a document that listed the size of fields and people in the area.

Q: How did you collect taxes? As you know when an official collected taxes, he needed a basic tax foundation to collect it.

A: When I was there, the estate belonged to the government, so I made a list of our total income and gave the list to the Shigatse Dzong and they would give me a receipt. I stored the yield in our estate.

Q: Did you have a storehouse?

A: Yes, we had grain storehouses. The main income was grain. We did not have any other income. We stored the grain in our estate and if (the government) sent an order to use it for something, we gave the grain. However, when I was there, I never got such an order.

Q: What kind of taxes did you collect?

A: In Lungmar, the estate had some land and the local people worked for us without payment. We did not even have to give food to them. We continued the way Reting Labrang had managed it. In this area we did not have lands that were leased to the local people for which we were paid in grain. At that time, many other dzong and estates had such lease incomes, but we did not have any income from the leases.

Q: How did you practice collecting the grain tax according to the land? Was it really based on the land or households?

A: It was according to the land. If one had bigger land holdings, the person should hand in more. In the other county governments and estates, there were tregang or magang, and some households had more than two magang, but we did not have households who had even one tregang. The system was different from others because it had been controlled by Reting Labrang. There were

only about twenty miser households.

Q: What was the relationship between the Gyantse County government and Lungmar?

A: We did not have any relationship. We were under the Shigatse District.

Q: Could the Gyantse County government order you to do something?

A: No, absolutely not.

Q: It was not like the system of today's county level government and xiang level government, was it?

A: It was different from today. We were under the Shigatse Dzong. We were not subjects of Gyantse.

Q: What happened in the 1959 revolt?

A: The revolt arose in March. I was in Gyantse and I returned to my home. I handed in a list of income to the Shigatse Dzong before the New Year. I (left Lungmar and) stayed in Gyantse one night. That night, I played mahjong with Kyibu Tsenden Phüntso [Tib. skyid sbug tshe brtan phun tshogs] of the Kyibu household. Yin Fatang was in Gyantse and he gave us a dinner. Then I went to Shigatse and I did the accounts for them. Finally, I returned to my home in Gyatso [Tib. rgya mtso] in Namling County. While I was there, the revolt occurred.

Q: What else?

A: I was in my home in Gyatso. My brother had moved into the courtyard of the TAR. He did not sign his name in Norbulinga and because of this he was considered a progressive [Tib. yar thon] so he got a certificate from the TAR for me and sent it to me. So before the reforms were carried out in my hometown, I had already come to Lhasa. Our old house was located in the front of Taring's [Tib. phreng ring] house and because prisoners lived there, we were given a house called Tshangkyl [Tib. tshang skyid] in Shöl. When I arrived in Lhasa, my brother and his family were living in Shöl and I lived with them. After three or four months, I was sent to the Tibetan Cadres' School [Ch. zang ganxiao] to study.

At that time, there was a training class for administrative management [Tib. srid 'dzin 'dzin grwa]. I studied in this school for a year and after I graduated, I was sent to the Political Consultative Conference of the TAR. I worked for the Tibetan Political Consultative Conference until 1964. In 1964, the Panchen Lama event happened and I was not happy with it emotionally. As you know, the Panchen Lama was different from the Dalai Lama. He was a progressive all the time, but he met problems. I really felt disappointed about it from the bottom of my heart, so I said something reckless at a study session and in other situations. Because of this reason, I was sent to an "education through labor" camp [Tib. ngal rtsol gyi slob gso; Ch. lao jiao] in Sangyib [Tib. gsang yib] in the upper part of Trapchi. It was called "laojiao" [Ch. lao jiao] by the Chinese. The party secretary, Lao Zhou, came to send me [off] and he told me in Chinese in the car that, "You are being sent to an 'education through labor' camp for three years. When you finish this you can come back to our work unit in the Political Consultative Conference."

My "education through labor" term was finished in 1968, but the Cultural Revolution had begun. So the Political Consultative Conference was kind of scattered [Tib. 'thor] and (most members of) the Political Consultative Conference were sent to reform themselves. They were sent to make bricks and were ordered to do other kinds of labor. Therefore, I continued to stay in Sangyib [Tib. gsang yib] until 1969. Then I was sent to the Nyingtri [Tib. nying khri] Lumber Factory [Ch. fa mu chang] in Kongpo with some others. I was also in the Bureau for Reforming Through Labor [Ch. lao gai ju]. I worked there until 1978. In 1978, we were sent back to Lhasa and I was picked to be in the Political Consultative Conference.

Q: Could you please tell me a little about your family history.

A: I already told you the origin of our family. The origin of our paternal line is related to the Seru Gungtön (of King Songtsen gambo). This (patrilineal) line has never been broken. I heard that our family usually has lots of sons. I had heard about it. Since the fifth Dalai Lama established the Ganden Potrang government (Tib. dga' ldan pho brang [the Tibetan government]), the first member of our family to serve this government was one of our grandfathers during the time of the seventh Dalai Lama. However, he did not get much education, so even though he registered as a member of government service, he stayed most of the time in our home in Tsang.

Then a few generations were not able to be members of the government. In short, my father was the fifth who served the government from our family. However, my brother and I were the only ones who served the government at the same time from one family. When my father was still living, my brother entered the government service and then I entered too. So our original kinship came from Seru Gungtön and the lineage has never been broken. From our family, I guess we only have five people who have entered Tibetan government service.